



Remarks by:

THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN
Minister of Public Administration
Member of Parliament for San Fernando West

2014 ADVANCED LEVEL SCHOLARS SYMPOSIUM

The Hyatt Regency
Wednesday 12th November, 2014
8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Master of Ceremonies

Ms. Gillian Macintyre, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education

Ms. Prabha Maraj, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration

Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Education

Her Honour Justice Gillian Lucky, Our Guest Speaker

Parents and Guardians

Scholarship Winners

Members of the Media

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning and Seasons Greetings to you all...

Every year, at a gathering such as this, we in the Ministry are reminded in a powerful way that all our efforts to transform the entire scholarship process, and make it transparent and objective, are worthwhile. As we look out at your young and eager faces, brimming with promise, we are energised even further to continue going that extra mile for you, just as we did for your predecessors, and as we will continue to do for your successors. We know that making this pledge of support will be worth it, because we are doing it for people who have defied the odds, and who will beat the odds yet again.

Over the last couple of years that we have held this Symposium, we have shared so many different types of advice with our advanced level scholars, including maximise this opportunity to the fullest; and continue striving for excellence; and consider how the technical knowledge and training you acquire can be adapted to the development of our country.

This year, as in other years, we remind our scholars that they are indeed a special group of people – high achievers – representing only zero point zero three per cent (0.03%) of the total population. You are winners and nothing beats that.

There was a time when the Government would have granted only thirty-five scholarships, or even less. That was in the 20th Century when this country was only just beginning to understand what it means to be a nation, and what its development demands and requirements would become. This year, Government has awarded some 447 scholarships – the largest number in this country's history. Over the last seven years, we have awarded some

3,077 scholarships, making a tremendous investment of billions of dollars. As PS Macintyre would have revealed, we are investing into you some \$110 million dollars of hard-earned taxpayers' money, every year.

Somehow though, the return on investment is not what it should be.

The country's productivity levels are falling and our nation's competitiveness ranking continues to slide. Research is showing us that even though you may be achieving academically, you cannot achieve in the workplace because of the wrong types of behaviours and attitudes. And therefore, today, we have been forced to reintroduce a whole range of competencies, and to make huge investments in training programmes to develop the right behaviours, the right attitudes and the right value systems.

Many of you are balanced. You have successfully combined scholarship with other values that are important: school, community, family, social and spiritual. We want you to continue this. All of you here today have already proven that you are very special young people and that you have a key role in the development of our country. But before you can develop Trinidad and Tobago, first, you must develop yourselves. You must make yourselves the best you can be.

Even while at university, you have an opportunity to begin developing some of those critical competencies which I mentioned a short while ago, and for which the workplace is crying out. I am referring to **INNOVATION, TEAM WORK, THE RIGHT ATTITUDE** and **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**.

One of the reasons so many bright and talented people fail to achieve their fullest potential is because of their ATTITUDE. As I observed earlier, your scholarship will help you develop your technical competencies, but it also is important that you develop other skillsets that will help you to be more productive members of the country's workforce.

It has been my experience that those people who hold on to the selfish and individualistic paradigm believing it is the best way for them to get ahead, discover – sometimes painfully – that it is not. In the end, they are the biggest losers, along with the company, community and country who could have benefitted from their special gifts and talents. They did not understand that it is better to be a SERVANT LEADER, than to be self-serving. If we are to become a better world, we need more servant leaders who understand the importance of interacting with others in a way that enriches lives, builds strong organisations, and moves us all closer to creating a more just and caring world. Today, this is the challenge I lay at the feet of all you servant leaders in training: the world that you leave behind you must be better than this one you have inherited. All your potential, undisputed talent and ability; all that you are and all you will be, should be focused on this worthy goal. Leave a better world than the one you were born into. Be game changers.

Trinidad and Tobago is small. Even if you go to the University here you will find that the world of Academia to which it is a passport, the world of scholarship, the world of achievement is

bigger. Your scholarship is a window of opportunity to an enormous edifice, a Castle of beauty and splendour, a treasure trove of learning... But also a place with shark-filled moats, pitfalls, dungeons and dragons...

Most, if not all of you, never before have been completely on your own for any substantial period. Now some of you will be, and in foreign countries where the morals and manners are different, and where temptations abound. Remember, you are our ambassadors while you are there. Fly our flag proudly.

Many of you have never been in charge of your own finances before and now, you will have to manage money, as well as your lives. You will have triumphs and you will have disasters, good days and bad days, and the wonder of it all is that they all contribute to making you the best you can be. I generally advise young persons like you who are on the cusp between adolescence and adulthood to enjoy the experience, but never get carried away by it. Don't abandon the values that have helped you to defy the odds so far, for values that are untried or untested which may not be right for you.

Never forget where you came from even as your world has expanded exponentially. Your parents, teachers and the community who helped you get this far still deserve your respect and consideration. In this world of instant communication – Internet, Facebook, Twitter, What's App, Skype – you can keep up with everyone. In my time this was not possible, and the letters from home, or the opportunity to go home, were always precious.

It is said that the egg must break for the bird to fly. In other words, leaving home is something we must all do to become a person in our own right; and for you, a successful person in your own right. Extend your horizons, compete in the big pond and make a name for yourselves. Take comfort in knowing that your parents and all of us here at the Ministry are standing with you.

However, our support and your success which we are banking on, come with a price. It is a small price to pay for what we give to you, our **Scholars of 2014**. You are a critical element in the overall Master Plan for Trinidad and Tobago's sustainable development. We want you to lower the odds for other young people achieving what you have achieved. We want you to help us raise the level from zero point zero three per cent to three, and then 10 and then 20 percent of the population with credentials and qualifications, with tertiary education and with certified skills. As we prepare for the eventual and inevitable life without hydrocarbons, we must have a more educated, more skilful and more dedicated population.

One of our greatest gifts is our diversity. Appreciate that within our diverse and cosmopolitan nature are the seeds for creativity and tremendous synergies. Combine these with the right skills, attitudes, servant leadership and innovation, and who knows what can be achieved? We must have more responsible responses to the challenges of daily living and strategic planning. You can contribute to this development in time to come.

I want to see you continue to defy – and even define – the odds. Judge Gillian Lucky, who spoke to you and not just entertained but inspired you, defies the odds in every sense. Maybe she will defy them even further, or one of you here might become the first female Chief Justice of this country. Maybe some of you here might discover a cure or invent new materials to help make life better. My challenge to you is that as game-changers you will define the future, reduce the odds and achieve the hitherto impossible.

There is a story about a student who went to the Dean to complain about a lecturer he accused of being lazy. He said, “The man has used the same question paper for the past thirty years.” Hauled before the dean, the lecturer said simply, “Yes, the questions have remained the same every year, but every year the answers have changed.” You have to find those answers for us.

I pray that God will continue to guide you on this journey upon which you have embarked so brilliantly. I pray He will bless your parents and guardians with the wisdom and wherewithal to support you through this part of your life’s journey and most importantly, the courage to keep you on the straight and narrow path... ultimately leading you to become passionate patriots who contribute greatly to the development of our country...

As I close, I want to end with my own adaptation of something that General Douglas Mc Arthur prayed for. He called it a “Prayer for His Son” but I see it as a prayer for our children, especially you who are here today and who have already embarked or due to embark on the most important phase of your life’s journey for which everything so far has been preparation and all that follows will be a sequel.

“Build me children, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when they are weak; and brave enough to face themselves when they are afraid; children who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat and humble and gentle in victory.”

“Build me children whose wishes will not take the place of deeds; children who will know Thee -- and that to know themselves is the foundation stone of knowledge.”

“Lead them, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let them learn to stand up in the storm; here let them learn compassion for those who fail.”

“Build me children whose hearts will be clear, whose goals will be high, children who will master themselves before they seek to master other men, children who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past”

“And after all these things are theirs, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that they may always be serious, yet never take themselves too seriously. Give them humility, so that they may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, and the meekness of true strength.”

"Then we, their parents, will dare to whisper, "I have not lived in vain!"

May God bless you all...

May God bless Trinidad and Tobago!

I THANK YOU.

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